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26 June 1969

MEMORANDUM FOR: CIA Coins Manager

SUBJECT   : Comments on NSA Paper, "Comparison of
                      User Languages for COINS," 6 June 1969

1. I have scanned subject report. The comments below are my
own; I have not solicited reactions from anyone in OCS because of the
time constraints on your reply to the Project Manager. However, I
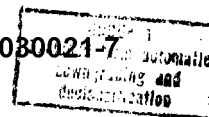have routed the report to _____ who may give   25X1
you some oral comments.

2. In general, I believe the report is a useful vehicle for
beginning a discussion on the functional aspects of a follow-on COINS
system. Not only does it provide factual material about existing
facilities, but it provides a good checklist for reviewing file manage-
ment systems in general. I agree with you that major consideration
of this subject should be deferred until the more important questions
are addressed in COINS.

3. My major concern about the report is that the author chose
to include a "paper" system (QUL) in the comparison. In addition to
TORQUE II, I assume other follow-on systems are being developed
by other agencies which are just as appropriate for consideration as
QUL. Inclusion of QUL would not have bothered me so much if the
author had stuck to his announced ground rule: "This evaluation and ILLEGIB
all comparisons were done strictly from a technical and functional
point of view." The author clearly had a bias which seemed to
correlate with his own knowledge of the systems he considered
(favoring the ones he knew the most about). He tends to use QUL as
a standard against which other systems should be measured. The
basic fault with using any system as a standard for comparison is that
the evaluator naturally tends to assume that its features are canonical-
that simply because they are available they take on the appearance of
being vitally necessary and that any system that falls short is to be
damned.

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4. I agree with the author's ordering of the various classes of system capabilities in paragraph 4 of his covering memorandum.

5. The report has several factual errors concerning TORQUE. Specifically, TORQUE does provide what the author calls "trailer" structures (page 2), TORQUE does provide a range query facility (page 6), TORQUE can test for the non-existence of a data value (page 8), TORQUE can accommodate a list of values to be OR'ed within one field name (page 9), TORQUE provides for logical NOT (at the operator level) (page 10), TORQUE does provide some output format capability, at least in allowing the user to specify the sequence of data columns (page 15).

6. The implication in the covering memorandum and the phrase on page 4, "in order to make a final decision . . . ." is that a decision has already been made that a common file management system will be used in the follow-on COINS system--presumptious.

7. A major aspect of these systems was ignored in the report-- whether or not the facilities are available under an interactive executive system. The author hints at this in his discussion of iterative querying (page 6), but it wasn't clear to me which one of the systems described provide interactive services.

8. I question the author's judgment about the relative importance of the scan operator (page 7). There are several other indirect inferences concerning the personal judgment of the author about the importance of functions to the user--judgments which are speculative until the user view has been solicited.

9. Another important aspect of these systems was not discussed: the means by which the scope of a query or other functional condition is defined. For example, over what portion of a record is an AND'ed condition to be satisfied? Or what portion of the record is to be considered in the display condition?
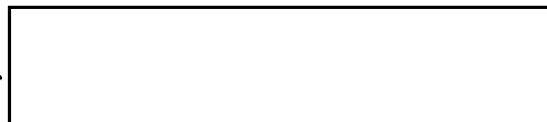
10. The author gives passing attention to the question of how much power the user really needs (page 13). This question needs to be examined very carefully; a system that provides a powerful set of facilities has the obvious implications of overkill, significant training, and perhaps inefficient operation.

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11. It is not clear that output media other than a typewriter or CRT display are appropriate to the COINS Network (page 16).

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ꞏ Deputy Director of Computer Services

cc: C/APS
    C/ISD